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ABSTRACT

DART is a New Jersey statewide center for Dissemination, Advocacy, Research, and Training related to infants and toddlers, their families, and caregivers. This article describes the Trainer of Trainers mentoring model adopted by DART to increase the competency of child care supervisors and therefore the quality of care for infants and toddlers. It begins with an introduction to DART and the training program, including its participants, mission, structure, and objectives. Following is a description of the program's curriculum, such as its reliance on an interactional model of caregiver-child relationships, its three themes (child/adult development; the interactional processes of signaling, reciprocity, synchrony, attunement, and acknowledgment; and clinical supervision/mentoring), and the skills it is intended to develop. Next is a description of the course outline and development, including the topics of its 14 seminars and their relation to the program's 3 themes. The remainder of the article describes the results of an evaluation study completed in the program's third year, which was conducted in three parts: (1) a process evaluation to document the effects of training on participants and their classrooms; (2) policy and implications; and (3) outcome evaluation to make recommendations for improvement and to develop strategies to institutionalize the program. Contains 13 references. (EV)

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THE DART MENTOR TEACHER MODEL: TRAINING EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPERVISORS TO ASSIST BEGINNING TEACHERS

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Introduction

According to several recent studies (Carnegie Corp., 1994, Kontos, S., Howes, C., Shinn, M. & Galinsky, E., 1994, Whitebook, M., Howes, C. & Phillips, D. 1989), hundreds of thousands of young children across the country spend most of their waking hours in child care centers that actually diminish their intellectual and emotional development. This is due in large measure to the poor quality of child care center staffs. For the most part, there are minimum or no requirements or regulations governing competency of caregivers. To respond to this situation, The DART Center at Kean College was established in 1990 through the efforts of child care professionals in New Jersey who make up the Coalition of Infant/Toddler Educators *(CITE)* and the faculty in the Department of Early Childhood and Family Studies at Kean College, New Jersey, USA.

DART is a New Jersey statewide Center for Dissemination, Advocacy, Research and Training related to infants/toddlers, their families and providers of infant/toddler child care and family day care. DART evolved to answer the need in New Jersey for a central clearing house which could develop and deliver training to caregivers and supervisors of programs for children birth to three years; advocate for this population alone or with coalitions; disseminate information through meetings, video materials and

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books; and conduct related research. It includes a Board, a Director and ancillary staff including field trainers.

The DART Center Board devised an initial Trainer of Trainers model where a Master Trainer would implement a program based in social interaction theories. This proposal was funded by The Prudential Foundation, A. T. & T. Family Development Fund and The Schumann Fund for New Jersey to hire a director to conduct training for three years. The Director of the DART Center served as the Master Trainer in its initial year; Field Trainers (advanced early childhood educators) acted as mentors to the child care supervisors annually involved in the program. In this way, each year 12 child care or family child care supervisors participated in the training, each paired with a Field Trainer. Within the supervised field experience, the supervisors served as mentors to their own staff in their individual settings.

The DART Center model emphasizes the interpersonal world of the infant/toddler (Stern, 1985) and the relationship of thinking, acting and feeling. It stresses imagination and the creative process, birth to age three, and the center/child/family triad. It recognizes the vulnerabilities of very young children in centers and family day care homes, of children of teen parents, and of infants and toddlers at risk for one reason or another. It seeks to develop in child care workers and home care providers the understandings, skills and attitudes necessary to promote and /or encourage resilience in the very young and the ability "to meet the world on their own terms." (Werner, 1988) The above is predicated on the Board's overriding belief that:

> *We as human beings, to survive fruitfully, need to understand ourselves, others, the world. We have to learn to be comfortable with ambiguity, to risk finding answers that are appropriate and do not violate the integrity of other human beings. We choose to act, to find out, to be responsible for what we do, and so we are transformed.*

Procedure

During the three-year period 1991-1993, the director identified field trainers, centers and center supervisors and made the plan functional. Thirty-six supervisors took part in a comprehensive nine month program which included sixty (60) hours of seminars and twenty-five (25) hours of supervised field experience. Each supervisor was paired with a field trainer who was a master teacher. The master teacher/supervisor relationship included mentoring, coaching, and supervising and became a critical component of the DART model of training.

Classes were held every other week, while a supervised field experience followed in the alternate week. Classes were interactive seminars, and process oriented. Time was allowed for new ideas to be absorbed, new techniques to be practiced and for a mentor-supervisor relationship to grow.

Teaching strategies were devised to demonstrate how adults learn and what "best practice" in infant toddler education means.

Goal

The goal of this initial DART Training of Trainers program was to increase the quality of care for infants and toddlers through improving the competency of child care supervisors. Basically, their knowledge and skills would be enhanced and, in addition, they would learn to be teachers and mentors of their own caregiver staff.

There were four major objectives for training:

- To improve the effectiveness of center supervision through staff development.
- To improve the quality of caregiver/supervisor interactions.
- To improve the quality of adult/child interactions.
- To improve the overall quality of life in a center-based or family child care program.

Curriculum

The DART Center Model asserts that the character of life in infant-toddler centers increases positively as the entire staff, especially the supervisors and caregivers, base their program in an interactional model that respects the integrity of each participant. Interaction is a dynamic, complex, give and take affective dialogue leading toward higher competence for child *and* adult. Development occurs through transactions between infant/toddlers and caregivers that are reciprocal, mutually beneficial, enjoyable and acknowledged. The DART Center model recognizes that "infant education is thus more intense, more physical and more personal than preschool education..." (Cataldo, 1983) and that the psycho-social development of the child, the "affective dialogue" (Spitz, 1957) between young child and adult, is crucial to both concerned. For these reasons the DART Mentor Teacher curriculum model is composed of three interactive strands: infant/toddler-adult development; interactional processes o*f signaling, reciprocity, synchrony, attunement and acknowledgment*; and clinical supervision/mentoring. These strands serve as linkages for transmitting training across all levels of staff.

It was hoped that the supervisors would gain the following understandings and concomitant skills:

- adult personality development and learning styles.
- infant/toddler child development and appropriate child care practices.
- clinical supervision processes
- quality relationships as defined by interactional processes which are discussed below.

Course Outline and Development

The program was presented in fourteen seminars and included the following topics:

- Introduction to the DART Training of Trainers Model
- Adult Development
- Using the Harms Clifford Environment Rating Scale
- Infant Development
- Interactional Processes
- The Caregiver as Curriculum
- Developing Primary Caregiving Systems
- Supervision and Mentoring including conducting effective staff development .
- Developing Creativity and Problem Solving Skills
- Promoting Effective Family Relationships

The seminar series began with understanding the concept of adult personality development through the use of the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory (1977); stages of adult development and how adults learn best followed.

The next topic was assessment of the child care center environment. Supervisors were taught to use the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale or the Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1990, 1989) and assessments were made of each child care site.

The child as learner followed and included infant/toddler child development, the caregiver as curriculum, primary caregiving, creativity and problem-solving, and the child and family.

The social-emotional life of the infant/toddler as defined in the interactional processes were identified and discussed throughout the seminars. Two specific seminars were targeted for in-depth discussion of this topic using video, role-playing and modeling.

Supervision, as the third major strand, was critical to the growth and development of competent caregivers. Three sessions were allocated to identify the stages of clinical supervision, provide case examples, and finally to practice through role playing the specific steps of the process. Special attention was given to *dialogue* as delineated by Makay and Gaw reported in Beatty (1976). The roots of *mentorship* are in this dialogue.

The dialogic communicator primarily aims at

(a) unconditional positive regard - valuing the worth of the other person to help him/her become what he/she can become as an individual,

(b) love--one is non manipulative, accepting of the other for who that person is,

(c) courage in communication - letting oneself actually be known,

(d) genuineness in self and image projection - not playing roles, rather developing oneself in accord with the authentic or actual self,

(e) accurate empathic response - ability to perceive the standpoint of the speaker, f) realistic communicative equality - each person views the other as unique and distinct persons, not as objects for manipulation or exploitation, and

(g) presentness - full involvement, one with the other taking the time to be easily accessible. (pp. 525-530)

Interactional Processes as the Theoretical Base

In the DART Model, interactional processes - signaling, reciprocity, synchrony, attunement and acknowledgment - form the base for the content development. Literature on interactional processes (Bateson, 1972, Brazelton, 1974, Stern, 1985 and others) defines these terms. Signaling is a process in which the caregiver is responsive to infant/toddler cues. Reciprocity is the give and take response of the caregiver to infant/toddler signals. Synchrony refers to the match of infant/caregiver patterns demonstrated in areas of sleep/feeding/vocalization/visual regard and touch. Attunement is described as the availability of the caregiver to enter into the baby's experience with pleasure and joy. Finally, acknowledgment is the positive verbal/nonverbal response of the caregiver to the infant/toddler. As a group, they provide the uniqueness for the model. When practiced holistically they create quality interactions among staff, adult/child and adult/family.

In centers where children as young as infants are housed in groups for longer than eight hours, quality interactions are crucial to overall mental health. In the DART model, Master Trainers promote these interactive processes in bi-weekly seminars; Field Trainers mirror them in their supervision sessions. Supervisors model them with their direct care staff, and in the case of family care providers, with their immediate children and families.

Clinical Supervision

Traditionally supervision is not systematically taught in early childhood training programs. Usually, the way we learn supervision is on the job experience unless we had a graduate emphasis in that area. We often mimic the supervision style we are most familiar with - critical judgment of behaviors. Too often teachers sum-up supervision in this way. My supervisor (director) comes in to observe me for an hour once or twice a year. Afterwards, she says to me "Let me tell you what you're doing wrong. Here's what you need to do" This in no way enables the practitioners to grow professionally or to model "best practice." What it does is deter growth, offering no practical application and creating poor relations between the supervisor and the supervisee.

For the DART model we adapted the Cogan (1973) approach to clinical supervision for social work professionals. With it we used the interactional processes to promote collaboration and a non-judgmental approach. In this process, five steps were completed by each clinical supervisory practitioner:

- Pre-conference meeting
- Observation
- Feedback analysis and strategy
- Supervision conference
- Post-conference analysis

In our program field trainers met every other week with their supervisor to work through problem areas or weaknesses evident in their supervision and identified together. This was a help in implementing in-service staff development. It was the intention of the DART Training Model to provide child development content, communication skills and support through this new model of supervision. Thus, we would assist in the professional development of the supervisor. The above was essentially accomplished through the mentor-staff person relationship. The Field Trainer served in this capacity by modeling the interactive processes and the clinical method of supervision. Through a non-judgmental support role, the Field Trainer guided the supervisor in transforming behaviors in the areas of communication, supervision style, and attitudes which typically impede effective supervision.

Mentoring as a Transformative Process

The concept of transformation is implicit in the mentoring relationship. The mentor's role enables and empowers the protégé to transform in a way which mediates the risks involved in the process. Mentoring as a helping relationship is a support system. It forms the basis for exploring greater independence from childhood insecurity and growth into adulthood, leading one to professional development. Apart from the mother/infant dynamic, the

transactional process in the mentoring relationship may constitute a uniquely powerful force in adult life. In this transactional process, the adult's search for meaning allows for the realization of his/her own identity, and growth, and ultimately transforms the adult's personal and professional "self."

By engaging in dialogue, setting tasks and exercises, creating dichotomies, the mentor challenges the protégé and forces a situation of cognitive dissonance and reflection. The protégé is enabled and empowered by the experience, thus creating a new perspective and a new vision. Seeing the world through new eyes is a transformative process. Participants in the DART Mentor Teacher training experienced changes in the areas of: self-confidence in their supervisory growth, greater willingness to collaborate in their supervisor/staff interactions, improvement in the quality of supervisor/staff interactions, and an increase in their professional development due to transformation of their self-perceptions related to education.

Evaluation Study

In the third year of the project, funding was secured to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the training project by an outside source. The study was conducted in three parts: a) a process evaluation to document the effects of training on the participants and the classrooms they work in, b) policy and implications and c) outcome evaluation to make recommendations for improvement and to develop strategies to institutionalize the program. The results of the evaluation were overwhelmingly positive and presented specific recommendations related to future replication of this training model.

Process Evaluation

The DART Training of Trainers Model was conceived primarily to provide in-service to supervisory staff in infant/toddler centers and family child care where there was little specific training available. This was seen as a way of affecting change in the entire center through the subsequent training of caregivers by supervisors and through the development of a *mutual dialogue* between all adults and infants and toddlers in each setting. In the first two years of training unique features were emerging. By year three, the evaluation study indicated that the *mentor-teacher concept* was the most significant feature of the program, surpassing even the rigorous content base. Interviews and surveys conducted during the post training evaluation emphasized the strengths in the one to one formal relationship between the

supervisor and her field trainer. Many connections developed between the pairs based on similar interests, utilization and growth of problem-solving and communication skills. Benchmarks in interactions showed behavioral changes in the areas of:

- improved communication skills
- improved content dissemination
- improved supervisor and staff interactions
- improved self-confidence in supervisory skills

The greatest testimony comes from the participants themselves. Project participants offered statements regarding the impact on their level of personal and professional development of skills, understandings and attitudes.

"The most important thing about DART was that it gave me confidence as a supervisor. I know I can deal with staff conflicts now."

"The strength of the program is the personal contact between the supervisor, field trainer, and Master Trainer. It's like three people working together on a project."

Statements reflected movement from supervisor to caregivers and changes in caregiver behavior with children as reported by supervisors.

"More attention is paid to the children during free play, bathroom time and when the children are on the sliding board."

"The one significant thing that I am proud to report is how my caregivers now respond to the children's signaling. They now give a verbal response to all cries, frets, yells, etc. They are also much more attentive to each child and his/her specific needs, so that no child is ever left out of a particular activity."

"There is more verbal interaction. The children are given more time to express their needs. In the past, the caregiver would respond before allowing the child to ask. The caregivers have also tried to be more open to new ideas and to be more creative in the activities for the children."

"I think there have been many subtle changes in the daily interactions with children. We've spent time discussing our interactions (i.e. quality times). I think through this process; we have a heightened awareness of the quality of our interactions. I've noticed change in key quality times like diapering. I've noticed caregivers genuinely interacting with the children during these times."

Policy and Implementation

Under policy and implementation, the evaluation study discussed the DART Training in the context of other similar programs throughout the United States. DART was identified as one of fifteen mentor teacher programs in the country. Three recommendations emerged informing policy: articulated credit, formal matching process for Mentors and Mentees, and broadening the auspices to include collaborating organizations.

Offering college credit is perceived as an asset and a means of helping participants advance within the field. Developing a formal matching process based on specified criteria will clarify the initial process of individual entry into a long-term relationship. Other policy issues related to developing a

credential for participants of the training and/or additional compensation for the participants. These features would improve the quality of child care and advance the participants professionally. By collaborating with several organizations the evaluators agreed that there is greater success in attracting different funding sources including longer term funding.

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation emerged in part from the policy recommendations as well as from articulation with the director:

- Provide college credit for training.
- Develop a formal matching process for mentors and mentees to maintain the efficiency of the training.
- Document training curriculum in a manual including goals of the DART Training, the philosophy and teaching style of the project, an overview of the curriculum, a summary of each seminar with objectives, main points to be covered, activities/small group ideas, materials, and reading assignments.
- Document roles and responsibilities of participants, written qualifications and job description for field trainers and Master Trainer.
- Formalize participant selection process.

Lessons Learned

DART must now become a more formal institutionalized program without losing its sensitivities and person to person commitments based in its interactional processes and mentorship that has been its strength. Training is much needed in the areas DART stresses. Since the 1991-1993 pilot study, two replication models have been conducted. There is now more focus on the DART Mentor Teacher concept. The strength of the relationships between master teacher/ supervisor and supervisor/caregiver promotes powerful changes in adult behaviors as well as supports and often sustains the novice teacher.

One value of the pilot study was to identify the characteristic features of an in-service staff development model in early care and education. The struggle to refine format, content, delivery methods and relationship issues will continue as we move on. We have modified initial conceptualization over the three years to reflect the perceived needs of the participants and will continue to do so as we *dialogue*. For this reason we believe that the program is fresh, rigorous and genuine in its attempt to provide opportunities for

both supervisors and practitioners to gain clarity, initiate reflective practices, and engage in collegial supervision and a mentoring support system.

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